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Casey And CIA

President-elect Reagan's nomination of William Casey for the critical Cabinet job of Director of Central Intelligence looks like a good one. Casey served as chief of intelligence for Europe in the nonsensical office of Strategic Services during World War II. It's a safe guess that he knows how to gather intelligence.

It is no secret that American intelligence capability has deteriorated in recent years, and doubts have already been expressed about Casey's ability to "reform" and "rebuild" the CIA. There is certainly plenty of rebuilding to do. But efforts at reform have been going on for ten years, and we have seen them go too far.

In November, 1978, President Carter complained that he had been poorly served by the CIA's reporting on the Iranian revolution. But rather than blame the Agency, he should have pointed the finger at Congress: that is where the responsibility for the feebleness of our current foreign intelligence operation lies.

In 1974, in response to evidence of abuses of the civil rights of Americans by intelligence bodies during the Vietnam protest era, Congress passed the Hughes-Ryan Act, the first in a series of bills that had the effect of crippling the nation's intelligence agencies. Hughes-Ryan amounted to a cutoff of funds for any CIA activities other than information collection, unless the President approved such activities and described them to Congress.

Hughes-Ryan locked the President into a cumbersome and potentially embarrassing reporting procedure, and brought clumsily into the public eye the heretofore unspoken recognition that the CIA did, indeed, engage in "covert activities." The effect was the almost total abandonment of such operations, with the foreseeable adverse impact

on intelligence gathering.

Shortly after the passage of Hughes-Ryan, both the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives established Select Committees to investigate the CIA. These were the Church and Pike Committees, named after their chairman, Sen. Frank Church and Rep. Otis Pike, who hunted wrong-doing by the Agency with vengeance. They found very little.

In June 1978, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act became law. It created nearly insurmountable obstacles to surveillance of foreign visitors to the U.S. The Association of Former Intelligence Officers (AFIO) a dedicated group of men who understand the meaning, and the need for covert activities, testified that the Act would hamstring the intelligence agencies' ability to watch subversives and spies. But the Act still stands.

Today, the Senate stands at the brink of approving a broad charter for intelligence gathering; the bill, S. 2525 would set up detailed oversight and disclosure rules for the CIA. The President would be required to reveal to Congress every minuscule detail of routine intelligence operations. Permanent Committees on Intelligence in both Houses of Congress are already in place for that purpose.

The direction of both Intelligence Committees has been that charted by the opponents of clandestine operations who first steered oversight and debatable violations of the civil rights of radicals, rather than intelligence-finding and combating the pervasive Soviet intelligence apparatus in this country. This is the tide that the new Director of Central Intelligence must swim against. The American intelligence agencies have been hobbled by nearly a decade of anti-intelligence posturing in Congress and the American press. In the silent war with the KGB, they are still limping.